DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 836 FL 014 188

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TITLE Process-Oriented Instruction in Composition.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 20p.; Based on a paper presented at the Oregon Teachers of English as a Second Language Conference (Portland, OR, 1982).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Journal Articles (080) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
JOURNAL CIT ORTESOL Journal; v4 p18-36 1983

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *English (Second Language); English Instruction; Error Patterns; Prewriting; *Process Education; Remedial Instruction; Revision (Written Composition); *Second Language Instruction; Sentence Combining; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Research into process-oriented writing instruction for native speakers of English can improve instruction in writing for students of English as a second language (ESL). Process-oriented instruction focuses on the processes of writing rather than on the finished product. A comparison of writing samples of native speakers from remedial courses and ESL students shows that despite differences in the types of grammatical and syntactical errors made, significant similarities exist. The ESL writer and remedial writer both approach writing in a linear fashion with preconceived ideas, and arrive at a conclusion too soon and without sufficient illustration or detail. Prewriting exercises in internal conversation are important for ESL students to develop rhetorical skills. In addition, instruction in two major native speaker composition skills, freewriting and problem-solving, are applicable to ESL writing instruction. Freewriting is a technique for exploring and synthesizing original ideas, helping to break down inhibitions about expressing ideas by deemphasizing correctness of surface structures. The problem-solving technique approaches a writing task as a problem to be solved, considering desired outcome, intended audience, and potential problems, much like notional-functional considerations identifying content and purpose. Each technique may have specific application to cultural groups. Additional classroom practices include using real communicative situations, sentence-combining exercises, teacher writing samples, and active revision. (MSE)

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PROCESS-ORIENTED INSTRUCTION IN COMPOSITION*

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Many of us know the joys of teaching writing to upper level ESL students. Their writing can be provocative and stimulating. On the other hand, we also know how frustrating the experience can be for both teacher and students. Since we know that many of our students will eventually be competing with native speakers in college classrooms and that their professors will expect idiomatic, well formed samples of exposition, we make valiant efforts to bring our students' writing ability up to "academic standards." Yet we often fall short of our goal -- not because our students lack intelligence or, for that matter, verbal proficiency, but because their writing remains, in certain respects, somehow "non-English."

Perhaps research into process-oriented instruction for native speakers can help us to improve writing instruction in ESL classes. Assuming that all writers, as human beings, share similar cognitive processes, we can agree with Vivian Zamel when she says:

> If we are dealing with students who are truly ready to express and compose, not ones who are still dealing with patterns and structures of language, we must rid ourselves of the belief that they need to be taught any differently than students learning to compose in regular English classrooms. (Zamel, 1976, p. 71.)

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This paper discusses the similarities between the compositions of basic writers and those of ESL writers,

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*This paper is based on a presentation titled "ESL Composition -- The Voyage In, The Voyage Out and Home" given at the 1982 ORTESOL Conference, Portland, Oregon.

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summarizes the two major process-oriented methodologies for teaching writing to native speakers, and then presents some suggestions for the application of native speaker research to the activities of the ESL classroom.

Until recently, writing instruction has focused primarily on "product" -- a completed piece of writing -- and it has therefore been concerned with the qualities of that finished product: unity, coherence, and emphasis. Instruction has focused primarily on "reader-based" considerations -- on a reader's evaluation of a piece of writing. For example, a major concern has been over whether or not a piece of writing has a central idea of thesis (unity). Today, however, attention has shifted to the "process" of writing, i.e., to invention (the creation of a piece of prose from notes to draft) and editing (the polishing and revision of a piece of writing). The emphasis, then, is placed on "writer-based" considerations -- on a writer's discovery of how he/she generates and completes a composition. Attention is placed on the stages of writing and the psychological processes involved.

The term "heuristic" is used to label modes of process instruction in writing, the two major heuristics being FREEWRITING and PROBLEM-SOLVING. Simply defined, the term "heuristics" means "a strategy" or "plan" for accomplishing something, in this case the composing or the invention of a piece of writing. In addition to the emphasis being placed on process instruction, renewed interest is being shown in the interface between reading and writing, especially as it relates to the complex role of a writer as both reader and writer.

1. Basic Writing

One area of research in native speaker writing from which we can learn is that of basic writing, once referred to as remedial writing, for the writing of foreign students and that of basic writers share many similarities. We would not, of course, say that both groups of writers are identical. However, if we

compare these two samples of writing, we see the similarities.

Sample A

> Employers should be prudent, trustworthy, and be able to put ideas into actions with accurate judgement. If a employer can not carry out ideas which are decided to make profits with great care, the company will probably be in bad business conditions in spite of good ideas. Employers play a very important role in companies. Even though a employer has very good sence to manage a company, he must make great efforst to manage the company with success; in other words, employers should be deligent in order to make their employees vigor. If a employer is not deligent, his emploees will not probably trust him. Therefore the characteristics of a employer is the most important elements for the company to succeed. In this paper I intend to focuss on three types of employees (owner of building, employer of restruant, employer of artitecture company).

Sample B

> The main point of this topic is that the Children at College students aren't learning how to read and write for that they will used later in life. I don't believe society has prepared me for the work I want to do that. is in education speaking, that my main point in being here, If this isn't a essay. of a thousand word's that because I don't have much to say. for it has been four years since I last wrote one, and by the time I am finished here I hope to be able to write a number of essay. (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 19.)

We can probably identify the first sample as that of a non-native speaker; the second, as that of a native speaker. There are differences in the types of grammatical and syntatical errors which occur, and the subject matter, too, gives us a clue to the difference. Despite these differences, the following charteris-tics described in Errors and Expectations by Mina Shaughnessy can be said to apply to both samples:

> At times variant and standard forms mix, as if students had half-learned two inflectional systems; hypercorrections that belong to no system jut out in unexpected places; idiosyncratic schemes of punctuation and spelling substitute for systems that were never learned and possibly never taught; evasive circumlocutions, syntactic derailments, timid script, and near guesses fog the meaning, if any remains after the student has thus spent himself on the sheer mechanics of getting something down on paper. (19)

Shaughnessy's term "derailed sentences" is most appropriate for many of the sentences produced by ESL writers. These sentences, while not "wrong" in a traditional sense and often, in fact, appearing to have a logic all their own, appearing sometimes to be even "poetic," can only by characterized as somehow "non-English." Such problem sentences, resulting partly from the use of interlanguage which contains many fossilized errors, can quite appropriately be described as "derailed"; they appear to head in one direction yet somehow never quite get there.

Since the goal of many of our ESL students, especially those in upper level writing classes, is to earn some type of undergraduate or graduate degree, they need to learn to write for academic purposes, and yet for these writers, as for basic writers of English, the conventions of academic writing are not well understood. Shaughnessy notes:

> For the Basic Writing student, academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone. The spoken language, looping back and forth between speakers, offering chances for groping and backing up and even hiding, leaving room for the language of hands and faces, of pitch and pauses, is generous and inviting. Next to this rich orchestration, writing is but a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn't know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer's eyes, searching for flaws. (7)

Like so many basic writers, non-native speakers of English lack what John Dewey labeled an "attitude of suspended conclusion" (Coe and Gutierrez, October 1981, p. 267), which characterizes good academic writing. Thus they arrive too early at a conclusion, their writing replete with generalization and trivia. Stated another way, the compositions of basic writers (substitute here "ESL writers") are charterized by a heavy reliance on the "...writer's unarticulated knowledge, with little or no exposition of that knowledge through examples, illustrations, and details" (Bartholomae, 1979). The ESL writer, like the basic writer, approaches the writing task in a linear fashion, preconceived notions in mind, and his product is therefore unconvincing, as half of the ideas worth exploring remain locked in his brain. Yet when we ask a non-native writer to explain what he/she has written and to clarify parts of it, the writer is usually able to tell us just what he/she means. With both non-native writers of English and basic writers, internal conversation is rarely practiced. Therefore the critical planning and experimenting that needs to go into a creation of a piece of prose -- the PRE-WRITING STAGE -- is sadly neglected.

It is important, then, for ESL instructors to give students exercises in pre-writing which develop their ability to engage in internal conversation, because this time of "talking to oneself" is critical to the writing process. (See Murray, 1982, for discussion of this aspect of the writing process.)

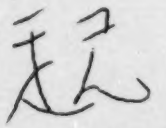
Complex as it is, the writing process is, in itself, a powerful heuristic for learning. For what other process in language production forces a learner to use simultaneously so many modes of learning -- visual, auditory (speaking to oneself), and kinesthetic?

That one learns to write by writing is obvious. Yet when we consider how difficult it is to create good writing assignments -- or, for that matter, to decide what to do with the writing once it's produced -- we can understand why instructors of ESL writing may resort to the use of the "models approach," asking students to follow paradigms in order to produce prose modeled after given rhetorical patterns -- enumeration, comparison and contrast, definition, cause and effect, and so forth. Such instruction, if not combined with some type of process instruciton, leads ultimately to "dead" writing -- prose that is mechanically correct but which slavishly follows the rules of form. Each essay is divided into Introduction, Body (consisting inevitably of three points -- whether there are three logical points or not), and a Conclusion (often a tacked on summary that is neither illuminating nor interesting).

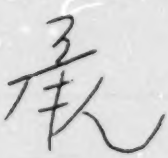
This is not to say, of course, that instruction in FORM is without its merits. The use of models and copying are, in fact, critical to instruction at lower levels, where students are not yet able to see the logic of identifiable written rhetorical patterns. At the upper levels, too, modeling can be highly instructive -- e.g., in the parodying of style, etc. The point here is that even at beginning levels of composition instruction, some provision should be made for the production of non-perfect forms -- that is, for the experimenting necessary to all pre-writing.

It is likely that very few of our students have been taught to do any pre-writing, even in their native languages. The type of writing instruction our students have had, either in English or in their native languages, may explain why, in addition to grammatical and syntatic problems, their writing lacks an overall

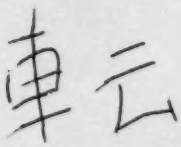
satisfactory rhetorical development. The so-called expository essay is, after all, a uniquely Western rhetorical mode. For students from countries which place a premium on oral narrative, the expository essay must, obviously, seem quite strange. And for students from countries where writing emphasizes the copying or religious and other important texts, again, the expository essay must appear a bizarre form of expression. And even for students from highly literate countries such as Japan, the expository style is likely to be unfamiliar. Japanese students are, as I understand, taught formal writing via a formula much like a syllogism.



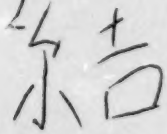
KI (Introduction)



SHO (Continuation)



TEN (Changes)



KETSU (Conclusion)

This type of writing, while challenging students to work logically through propositions to a conclusion, places little value on creative synthesizing or on the discovery of a serrendipitous new idea. What it does, in fact, is to teach a formula -- a preconceived pattern of logic, a pattern of writing (akin to the "models approach") -- which is often of meager help in the English writing class.

How, then, can we teach our students to experiment with their writing, to produce more writing, and at the same time teach them to organize according to acceptable rhetorical patterns?

2. The Freewriting and Problem-Solving Heuristics

The two major heuristics emerging in native speaker composition instruction -- the freewriting heuristic and the problem-solving heuristic -- may be helpful to us in ESL.

Though there are many variations of the freewriting heuristic, the technique basically allows one to write spontaneously, producing reams of data from which to shape a composition. (Probably the most well-known exponent of freewriting is Elbow (1971, 1983), who describes techniques for using freewriting effectively.) Since it is such a right-brained activity, freewriting gives students ample opportunity to explore ideas and to synthesize what they produce. Often lead-ing to wonderful new insights, freewriting encourages students to look at new and different ideas, often from perspectives they had never before considered. Elbow speaks of the "Voyage Out" -- a time during which one brainstorms for a plethora of ideas -- and then the "Voyage Home" -- a time for focussing and refining ideas, imposing order over chaos. This heurisitic, because it breaks down inhibitions a writer may have about what to say (the idea of the Voyage Out being to generate a wealth of ideas without worrying too much about order or correctness of surface structures such as spelling, punctuation, and unviolated syntax), allows the writer to experiment with his/her writing, exploring ideas that he/she would not otherwise have uncovered. As such, it is a heuristic which could profitably be used in an ESL writing class to help students garner ideas with which to develop a paper. (For a detailed discussion of the free-writing processes and their uses, see Ch. 8 of Elbow (1981), in which he explains the Loop Writing Process.)

The other powerful heuristic is the problem-solving heuristic, espoused by researchers such as

Linda Flower of Carnegie-Mellon University. This heuristic approaches a writing task as a problem to be solved. As such, it takes into account things such as desired outcome, intended audience, potential problems, etc. -- akin, I think, to notional/functional considerations, which identify content and purpose. This approach would appear to be more left-brained than freewriting and could also be used profitably in ESL writing classes, especially with students from cultures which already emphasize right-brained, gestaltish modes of thinking.

In her text Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing (1981), Flower describes a multitude of strategies for coping with the writing task. Since the problem-solving heurisitc is really a complex of strategies for analyzing and solving a problem, there are too many types of exercises in Flower's text for me to detail them here. There are, however, two salient characteristics of the problem-solving approach I would like to point out: (1) an emphasis on reader considerations -- that is, exercises to teach a writer to devise ways of communicating with and moving (persuading) a particular audience -- and (2) an emphasis on the use of "trees" as ways of looking at a problem to analyze its parts, as well as to see how these parts can be worked together for greater coherence in writing.

This sample of a writing problem (presented early in Flower's text), including the tree diagrams which represent the organizational structures of three approaches to the problem, may help to clarify the use of such diagrams:

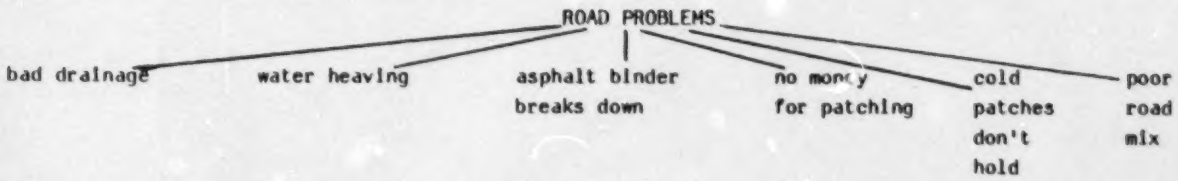
A PRACTICAL WRITING PROBLEM

> The following chain of events started in December when a staff writer for City magazine did a feature article on potholes....She wanted to analyze, from her perspective, why the local roads were in such bad repair despite rising road taxes. This article sparked a worried note from the City/County Commissioners' office to

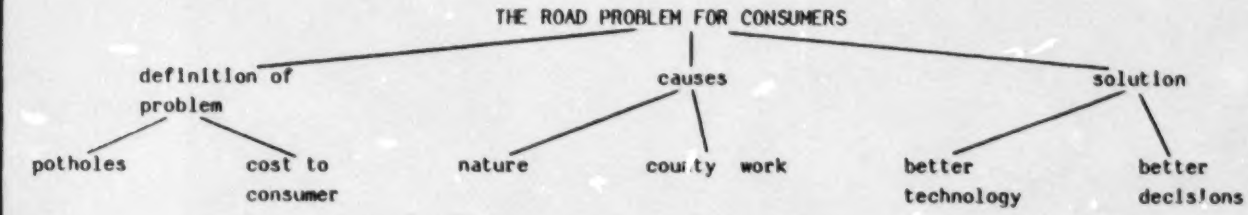
> the Department of Roads saying: "What is the trouble? We must respond." So in response, a city transportation engineer was asked to look into the situation, define the problem more thoroughly, and write a report that explained why the local paving was falling apart....This report in turn led to a resear_h engineer with the local asphalt supplier to reply with a more techinical analysis of the road mix the department was buying and the alternatives it had ignored....
>
> As you can see in the examples, each writer viewed the problem differently and produced a very different-looking piece of prose. But all shared the three goals of making a meaning out of facts, communicating it, and persuading a reader to do or see something differenlty. (Flower, 1981, p. 4)

Compare the following diagrams and you will see the differences in the trees produced (Flower, 1981, pp. 10-11):

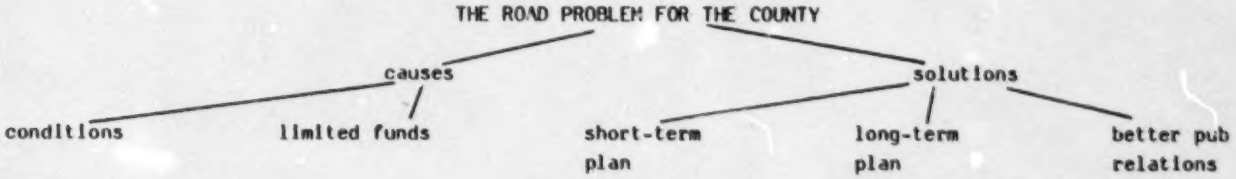
A flat, undeveloped hierarchy



The feature writer's tree



The transportation department writer's tree



28

Tree diagrams and their heirarchical levels depend, of course, on the writer's subject, intended audience, and purpose for writing. Flower presents various types of exercises to help students generate different types of trees for different purposes. This study of structuring leads logically to a problem-solving task such as the following (Flower, 1981, p. 34):

> Your own problem. Generally the most fruitful problems to analyze are your own. Think of a problematic situation in which you find yourself when someone feels caught between two sides of a question. Examine the key conflict in your situation and write an analysis of the problem, giving alternatives, assumptions, and implications.

Finally, having studied different strategies for analyzing a problem, having examined his/her own writing process, and having been given ideas on how to plan, to generate, and to organize ideas, the student writer is asked to complete an assignment such as the following, which calls upon all of a writer's resources (Flower, 1981, p. 199):

> A problem-solving project. Assume that you are a free-lance consultant with special expertise in solving communications problems. You have recently noticed a problem involving communication -- it might be on your job, at school, or in some organization to which you belong. For example, you might want to solve a problem for other students by writing a short handbook on getting through self-paced courses at your school, or write a manual for new summer employees at the place you work. Just be sure to address a real problem someone faces. Do some additional study of the problem until you feel you have at least a rough grasp of where the difficulties lie. At this point you might want to prepare a proposal that outlines the problem and your

intentions to the reader, your client. Then, write a consulting report that carefully and imaginatively analyzes the problem and offers some solutions. Remember that your primary goal is to help a real reader solve a real problem, so keep that reader's needs and viewpoint in mind.

During their research Flower et al. identified the two basic types of prose mentioned earlier in this article: "reader-based prose" and "writer-based prose." This distinction is, I think, a helpful one for ESL instructors.

"Writer-based prose" Flower characterizes as possessing one or more of the following features (Flower, 1981, p. 149):

1. An egocentric focus on the writer.

2. A narrative organization focused on the writer's own discovery process.

3. A survey structure organized, like a textbook, around the writer's information.

In contrast, "reader-based prose"

1. Is organized around a problem, a thesis, or a purpose the writer wishes to share with the reader (not around the writer's own discovery process),

2. Is organized so that ideas are presented in a hierarchy, with the goal or thesis as the top level issue (major and minor ideas are distinguished and the relationships between them made explicit),

3. Makes conclusions explicit for the reader and does not "...leave the work of drawing inferences and forming concepts up to..." the reader, and

4. Makes the organization of concepts and ideas vivid and clear to the reader. (Flower, 1981, pp. 152-158.)

It is probably easier for all writers to produce "writer-based prose." The tendency to focus on the self and to tell stories in narrative structure goes, after all, back to our primitive ancestors who sat around a fire, unraveling tales of the day's adventures -- of the hunt, of the kill, of food for the hearth. And today, of course, there are times when the narrative structure is exactly right for the purpose and content of the writer.

Most ESL students, when given a choice, will use a narrative structure instead of an expository pattern. Thus they need ultimately to learn the conventions of "reader-based prose," which is what most academic writing is likely to require.

The question of which heuristic (freewriting or problem-solving) will lead to better academic writing needs to be further researched. (It is likely that an eclectic method will prove to be the most effective.) Although problem-solving has tended to be the more popular heuristic, there is some evidence that freewriting leads to more fluent and better organized academic essays and personal writing (see Hilgers, 1980).

Though the freewriting and problem-solving heuristics can be used to advantage in ESL classrooms, we should be cautious about jumping on either the freewriting or problem-solving bandwagons, as there are limitations to the use of these techniques with foreign students. The instructor who uses freewriting, for example, must quickly contend with the question of registers. On the one hand, students are producing in-or formal, colloquial English via free association (comething native speakers may learn to do more quickly and easily than non-native speakers); on the other hand, they will be expected to produce more formalized "expository prose" from the freewriting they have done.At some point the questions of style and appropriateness must be covered, yet we know how difficult these are to

hardcore, as they are determined in large part by extra-linguistic factors. Since we are dealing with students whose cultural patterns and values -- ways of thinking -- may differ drastically from our own, we must also account for these cultural differences.

As we teach students to organize out of their raw data (to find, as Elbow says, their "centers of gravity"), we are, in fact, opening up a vast potential for associations, conditioned not only by what a student has stored in his/her memory, but also by what he/she wishes to share in the first place (the student's emotional state at the time of the freewriting, his/her reactions to the freewriting experience itself, etc.). And all of these factors are, of course, in turn, conditioned by innate feelings and predispositions shaped by the writer's culture.

3. Implications for the Teaching of Composition in ESL Classes

We can see, then, how recent research into the native speaker writing process has powerful implications for ESL. In terms of classroom practice, this research would, I think, support the types of activities described in the suggestions given below:

1. Encourage the use of real communicative situations -- that is, having students use the writing that they are doing. If they are taking other classes, have them write papers for those classes. If they're having a problem with their landlord, have them write a letter to the landlord. You, as instructor, should help the student to read through the letter, playing the intended audience and reacting appropriately. Give the student feedback on your potential reactions as recipient of the epistle. There may be considerations the student has not made. Your comments will help him/her to understand the parameters of his/her linguistic behavior as they affect interpersonal communications. Is the letter

too mild? Is it offensive? Is the style too rococo? Is it well documented, convincing? In essence, what you are doing is helping the student to solve problems, taking into account audience, situation, purpose, and content.

2. Emphasize the PROCESS of writing, that which is often neglected in writing classes. It is just as important as the product, the paper ultimately produced. Use a lot of free and focussed freewriting exercises, going over them to help students identify potential "centers of gravity."

3. Use a lot of sentence-combining exercises -- not just simple paragraph exercises but those in which ideas about a given subject are presented out of order. This forces students to think through the sentences, clustering together those which are related. (There will, of course, be various ways -- options -- to organize the material, and a student's awareness of these options will be heightened.) Then have the students combine the sentences into logically developed paragraphs.

   Though the debate continues over whether sentence combining leads, in fact, to better writing, I would contend that modified sentence-combining exercises help to develop not only a student's syntactic fluency but his ability to think as well. One way, for example, of modifying sentence-combining exercises to add a measure of control and guidance is to present muddled sentences with visual cues to prompt responses. Students are, then, "actively and simultaneously involved in comprehension, analysis, and re-creation" (Watson, 1982, p. 12).

4. Set up individual conferences with students. Let them TALK about their papers. Encourage

discussion of papers as much as possible -- in peer critiques, in conferences with you, in paper sharing with the class, et. The only way we really measure the success of a piece of writing is to gain feedback from readers as to their reactions. Without this feedback we write in a vacuum. Thus we should create situations which provide students with feedback. They are not used to sharing their writing, and yet as writers they must, eventually, share with a reader other than you, the English teacher. They may as well learn how enjoyable -- as well as how sometimes painful -- it can be. Constructive feedback is a powerful reinforcer of learning.

5. Write with your students. Share with them. Show them pieces of work you have in progress, drafts of things you've completed. Teach them to use scissors and tape. Encourage them to use recycled paper or colored paper, for this squelches the tendency to look upon things written for the first time as perfected forms. Encourage revision.

By doing these kinds of things, we will help students to prepare for the writing they will need to do in later years without our help. They will come to view writing not merely as a linear process but as a process of interior monologue that must somehow transcend the limitations of biases and stereotypes, discarding superficial ideas in order to reach higher levels of analysis and synthesis. In short, we will teach our students TO THINK -- and to choose from the many options available to them for composing and inventing. We will take our students on a Voyage In, Out and Home -- "in" to explore their feelings and basic ideas and biases, "out" to explore new ideas and associations, and then "home" to shape and to synthesize new ideas and patterns into coherent pieces of writing.

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